

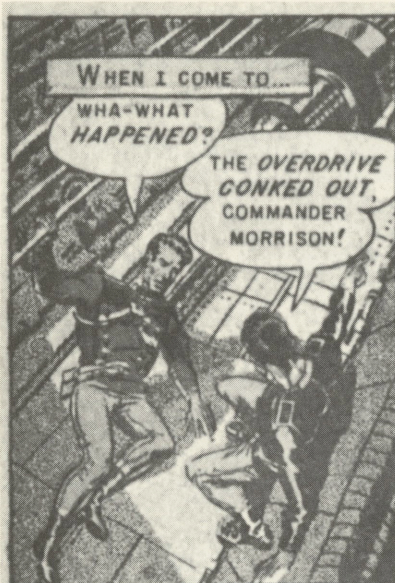
FANTASTIC EXPLOITS NUMBER 19



Authorized Edition



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WHEN I CAME TO...

WHA-WHAT
HAPPENED?

THE OVERDRIVE
GONKED OUT,
COMMANDER
MORRISON!



GOOD LORD! WITH-
OUT THE OVERDRIVE,
IT'LL TAKE US
SIXTY YEARS
TO GET HOME! CAN
IT BE FIXED,
ELLIS?

NOT UNLESS
WE LAND
SOMEWHERE,
SIR!



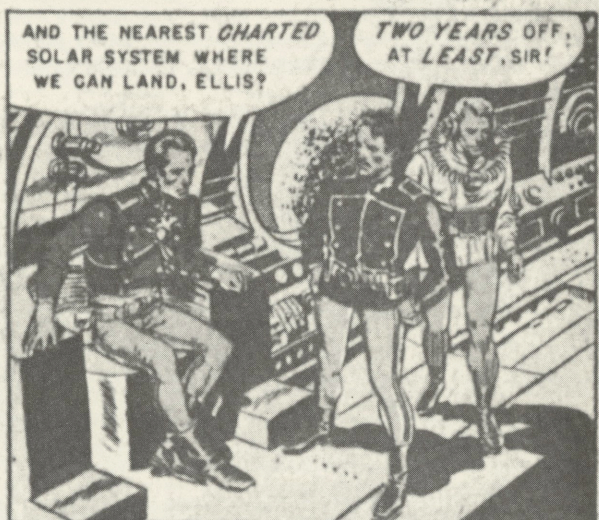
HOW FAR ARE WE
FROM THE NEAREST
SOLAR SYSTEM?

WITHOUT
OVERDRIVE,
ABOUT TWO
MONTHS
JOURNEY,
COMMANDER,
BUT...



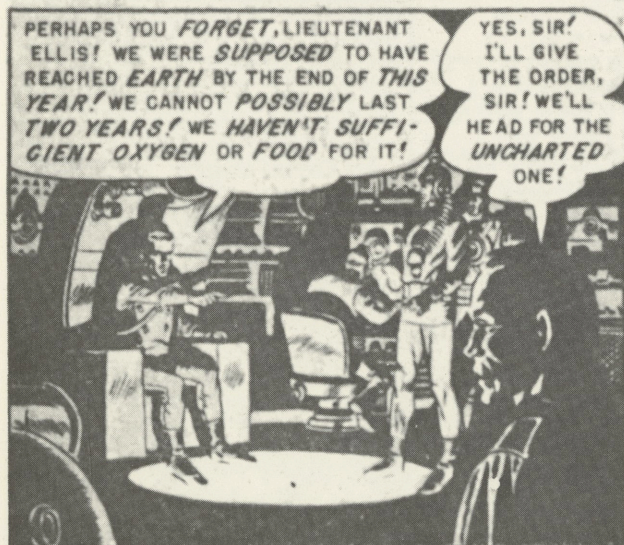
BUT WHAT,
ELLIS?

IT'S UNEXPLORED, SIR! THE SOLAR
SYSTEM, THAT IS! WE HAVE NO
GEOLOGICAL OR SOCIOLOGICAL
INFO ABOUT THE PLANETS! IT MAY
MEAN TROUBLE!



AND THE NEAREST CHARTED
SOLAR SYSTEM WHERE
WE CAN LAND, ELLIS?

TWO YEARS OFF,
AT LEAST, SIR!



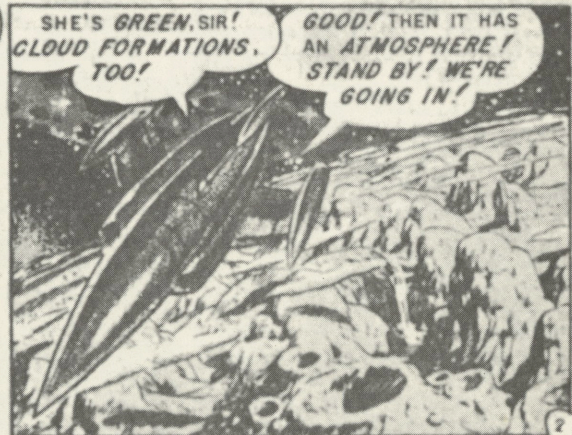
PERHAPS YOU FORGET, LIEUTENANT
ELLIS! WE WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE
REACHED EARTH BY THE END OF THIS
YEAR! WE CANNOT POSSIBLY LAST
TWO YEARS! WE HAVEN'T SUFFI-
CIENT OXYGEN OR FOOD FOR IT!

YES, SIR!
I'LL GIVE
THE ORDER,
SIR! WE'LL
HEAD FOR THE
UNCHARTED
ONE!

TWO MONTHS LATER, WE ENTER THE UNCHARTED
SOLAR SYSTEM! WE CIRCLE PLANET AFTER PLANET...
SIX IN ALL...UNTIL WE FIND A LIKELY-LOOKING ONE
TO LET-DOWN ON...

SHE'S GREEN, SIR!
CLOUD FORMATIONS,
TOO!

GOOD! THEN IT HAS
AN ATMOSPHERE!
STAND BY! WE'RE
GOING IN!



IN NO TIME FLAT WE'RE RESTING QUIETLY ON THE STRANGE NEW PLANET! THE DUST WE KICK UP WHEN WE LAND IS JUST BEGINNING TO SETTLE WHEN I PRESS THE PORT-CONTROL BUTTON...



SAY! LOOK OFF *THERE*! YOU'RE A *SETTLEMENT*! THERE'S *I-LIFE** ON THIS PLANET! *RIGHT, SIR!*

*I-LIFE: INTELLIGENT FORM OF LIFE!—ED.

I SET OFF WITH LIEUTENANT ELLIS TO INVESTIGATE THE COLONY WHILE THE CREW STARTS WORK ON THE OVERDRIVE! SUDDENLY, AS WE APPROACH...



THERE GO SOME OF THEM, SIR! *HUMANOID**! *TOO!* WHY... THEY'RE *RUNNING!*

THEY SEEM TO BE *AFRAID* OF US, ELLIS! THEY'RE *RUNNING AWAY* FROM US...

*HUMANOID: HAVING HUMAN FORM!—ED.

THE SETTLEMENT EMPTIES OUT FAST! THE ALIENS RUN LIKE CRAZY WHEN THEY SPOT US! THEY ALL HEAD FOR A BUNCH OF IGLOO-SHAPED STRUCTURES, AND EACH ALIEN SCRAMBLES INTO ONE...



MUST BE A TYPE OF *BOMB-SHELTER*, EH, ELLIS?

LOOKS THAT WAY, SIR! I BROUGHT MY *A-T UNIT**! SHALL I *TUNE 'EM IN?*

*A-T UNIT: AUTOMATIC TRANSLATOR UNIT!—ED.

GO AHEAD! I DIDN'T GET MUCH OF A *LOOK* AT THESE CREATURES! I'D *LIKE* TO! I... I *THOUGHT* I SAW *SOMETHING*... ER... *SOMETHING*...

I DID *TOO*, SIR! *FEMALES!* QUITE *ATTRACTIVE*, TOO! HERE GOES...



ELLIS SWITCHES ON HIS A-T UNIT AND TUNES IT TO 'UNIVERSAL'! THEN HE STARTS TALKING...

DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED! WE COME IN PEACE! WE MEAN NO HARM! OUR ROCKET-SHIP IS DISABLED AND WE HAVE LANDED HERE TO REPAIR IT!



THE SHY ALIENS POKE THEIR HEADS OUT OF THEIR LITTLE SHELTERS ONE BY ONE AS ELLIS'S MESSAGE IS AUTOMATICALLY TRANSLATED INTO THEIR NATIVE TONGUE...

WE ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE WITH ITS HEADQUARTERS ON THE PLANET EARTH!



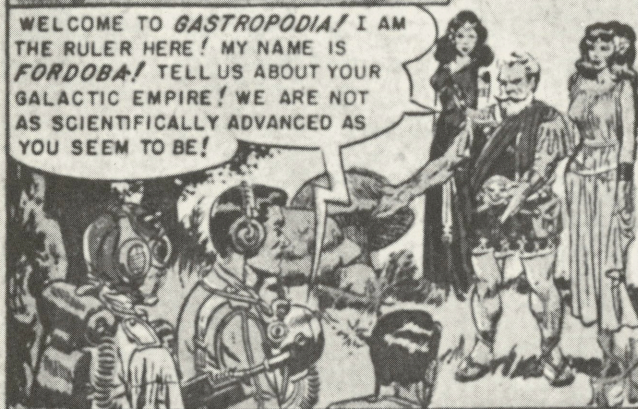
LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE ALIENS EMERGE FROM THEIR BOMB-SHELTERS AND EDGE TOWARD US...

WE CAN GAIN MUCH BY MUTUAL FRIENDSHIP! MY NAME IS ROBERT ELLIS! THIS IS THE SHIP'S COMMANDER, ARNOLD MORRISON...



FINALLY THE ALIENS ALL COME OUT OF THEIR SHELTERS AND STAND AROUND, EYEING US CURIOUSLY! THE FEMALES ARE ALL EXTREMELY BEAUTIFUL! ONE OF THE MALES... OBVIOUSLY THE CHIEF... STEPS FORWARD! ELLIS'S A.T. UNIT PICKS UP HIS CRACKLING VOICE...

WELCOME TO *GASTROPODIA*! I AM THE RULER HERE! MY NAME IS *FORDOBA*! TELL US ABOUT YOUR GALACTIC EMPIRE! WE ARE NOT AS SCIENTIFICALLY ADVANCED AS YOU SEEM TO BE!



WE SPEND MANY HOURS AFTER THAT GIVING THE ALIENS OF *GASTROPODIA* A ROUGH IDEA OF EARTH, AND THE OTHER MEMBER-PLANETS OF THE GALACTIC EMPIRE! THAT EVENING THE ENTIRE CREW IS ENTERTAINED LAVISHLY...

SOME FEAST, EH, COMMANDER?

DON'T BOTHER HIM, ELLIS! HE'S GOT HIS EYE ON THAT *BLONDE* OVER THERE!



FINALLY I GET UP ENOUGH NERVE TO INTRODUCE MYSELF TO THE GOLDEN-HAIRED ALIEN...

MY NAME IS *ARNOLD*! WHAT IS YOURS?

LUWANA!



YOU ARE VERY BEAUTIFUL, *LUWANA*! ARE YOU...ER...MARRIED?

MARRIED? WHAT IS THAT?

DO YOU HAVE A HUSBAND... A MATE?

OH, NO! I AM NOT MATED YET!



I GUESS I FALL IN LOVE WITH *LUWANA* ALMOST IMMEDIATELY! ANYWAY, BY THE TIME THE SHIP IS REPAIRED, I MAKE UP MY MIND...

YOU'RE *CRAZY*, COMMANDER! STAY *HERE*... ON *THIS* PRIMITIVE PLANET?

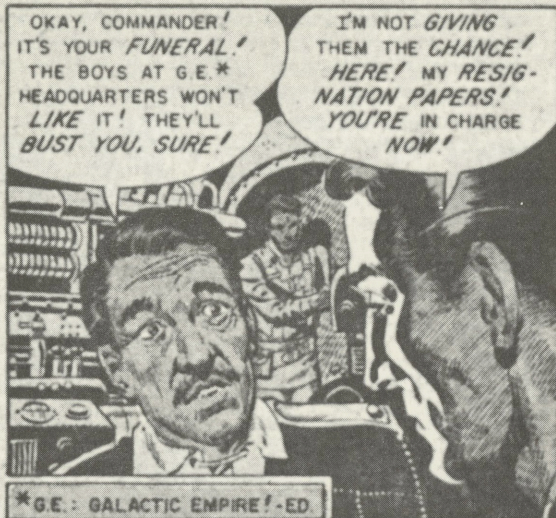
I'M IN LOVE WITH HER, *ELLIS*! SHE'S CONSENTED TO BE MY WIFE!



THEN BRING HER *BACK* WITH YOU! DON'T STAY *HERE*, SIR!

I'M TIRED, *ELLIS*! I'VE BEEN HOPPING AROUND THE GALAXY FOR *SIX* YEARS NOW! I WANT TO SETTLE DOWN! *THIS* PLACE LOOKS GOOD TO ME!





OKAY, COMMANDER!
IT'S YOUR *FUNERAL!*
THE BOYS AT G.E.*
HEADQUARTERS WON'T
LIKE IT! THEY'LL
BUST YOU, SURE!

I'M NOT *GIVING*
THEM THE *CHANCE!*
HERE! MY *RESIG-*
NATION PAPERS!
YOU'RE IN CHARGE
NOW!

*G.E.: GALACTIC EMPIRE! -ED



I... I'VE GOT TO *HAND*
IT TO YOU, SIR! YOU'VE GOT
NERVE! MAYBE...MAYBE
I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN SOME-
DAY...WHEN G.E. DECIDES TO
TAKE GASTROPODIA INTO
THE FOLD!

PERHAPS,
ELLIS! IN ANY
CASE, *GOOD*
LUCK ON YOUR
TRIP *BACK!*



I WATCH MY SHIP BLAST OFF
FROM MY NEW-FOUND-HOME...

S'LONG, YOU GUYS!



...AND AS THE ROCKET-TRAIL DIS-
APPEARS INTO THE BLUE ABOVE,
LUWANA IS AT MY SIDE...

IT IS TIME,
ARNOLD! COME!



...AND I KNOW I HAVE MADE THE
RIGHT CHOICE...

DEAREST...

FORDOBA AWAITS
US! HE WILL...AS
YOU SAY...MARRY
US!

SO, LUWANA AND I ARE 'MARRIED!' THE CEREMONY
IS A LITTLE PRIMITIVE, BUT I DON'T MIND MUCH! I
THINK OF LUWANA...HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS...AND HOW
VERY MUCH I LOVE HER...

TELL ME, LUWANA! I SEE
NO *CHILDREN* IN THE
SETTLEMENT! WHERE
ARE THEY *KEPT*?

BEYOND THAT *WALL!*
THEY ARE *KEPT* THERE
UNTIL THEY REACH
EMERGENCE-AGE!



YOU MEAN THE
MOTHER DOES NOT
BRING UP THE
CHILD?

OF *COURSE* NOT! WE
HAVE *COMPETENT SPECIAL-*
ISTS FOR THAT PURPOSE!
THE *MOTHER* GOES THERE
TO HAVE HER OFF-SPRING,
AND THEN *LEAVES* IT!



BUT WHAT ABOUT
**MATERNAL
LOVE?** ON
EARTH, WE FEEL
IT IS VERY NECES-
SARY FOR A CHILD'S
SECURITY.

MOTHER LOVE!
BAH! HOW
LONG CAN IT
LAST?



I AM FLABBERGASTED AT LUWANA'S
COLDNESS TOWARD THE CHILDREN
OF MY NEW SOCIETY! I WONDER
WHAT I CAN DO ABOUT CHANGING
THINGS, WHEN... COME AR: OLD!

ONE OF THE CHILDREN
HAS REACHED **EMERGENCE-
AGE!** SEE? THE GATE IS
OPENING!



THE GATE IN THE WALL...BEYOND
WHICH THE CHILDREN ARE KEPT...
OPENS, AND ONE OF THOSE IGLOO-
LIKE BOMB-SHELTERS IS PUSHED
OUT...

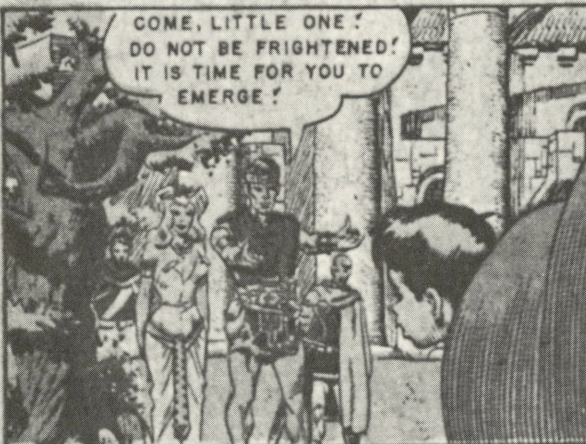
WHAT THE...?

SH-H-H,
DEAREST!
WATCH!



OTHERS OF THE COLONY GATHER AROUND THE
STRUCTURE... TRYING TO COAX THE YOUNGSTER FROM
HIS HIDING PLACE! FINALLY HIS WIDE EYED LITTLE
FACE APPEARS...

COME, LITTLE ONE!
DO NOT BE FRIGHTENED!
IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO
EMERGE!



FINALLY, THE YOUNGSTER CRAWLS FROM THE IGLOO-
THING! THE GATHERING CHEERS! THE BOY SMILES
SHYLY! THEN HIS SHELTER IS LIFTED ALOFT AND
CARRIED TO THE SPOT WHERE THE OTHERS ARE
LINED UP, ROW UPON ROW.

WHAT'S THE IDEA,
LUWANA?

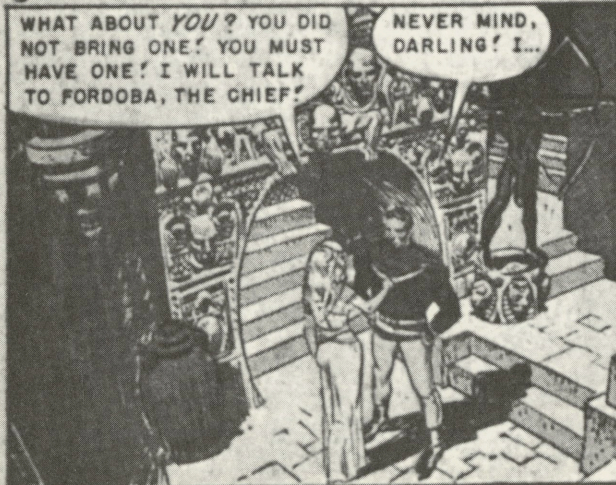
IT WILL **BE**
THERE WHEN HE
NEEDS IT!



SUDDENLY, LUWANA LOOKS AT ME... SHOCKED...

WHAT ABOUT **YOU?** YOU DID
NOT BRING ONE! YOU MUST
HAVE ONE! I WILL TALK
TO FORDOBA, THE CHIEF!

NEVER MIND,
DARLING! I...



BUT I GET MY IGLOO ANYWAY! LUWANA INSISTS!
USUALLY THEY **DESTROY** THEM WHEN THEIR
OWNER **KICKS OFF**, BUT **ONE** THEY **SAVE**...
FOR **ME**...

THERE! THAT IS YOURS!
RIGHT NEXT TO MINE!

GOOD! COME,
DARLING! LET'S GO
HOME! I WANT TO
BE **ALONE** WITH
YOU...



IT'S ABOUT SIX MONTHS LATER THAT THE STRANGE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS BEGINS! AT FIRST I DON'T THINK ANYTHING OF IT WHEN LUWANA CUTS HER LONG GOLDEN HAIR SHORT...



LUWANA! YOUR HAIR! WHAT DID YOU DO TO YOUR HAIR?

I CUT IT! IT IS TIME!

...OR WHEN SHE BEGINS TO LOSE HER EXOTIC FIGURE...

YOU'RE LOSING WEIGHT, DEAR! IS ANYTHING WRONG?

OF COURSE NOT, ARNOLD! IT IS AS IT SHOULD BE!



BUT WHEN HER FACE BEGINS TO CHANGE SLIGHTLY, I QUESTION HER...

LUWANA? ARE WE... I MEAN... ARE YOU...

HAVE A CHILD? NO, ARNOLD! IT IS TOO LATE!



AND I AM EVEN MORE CONFUSED WHEN LUWANA BEGINS TO SHUN MY ADVANCES...

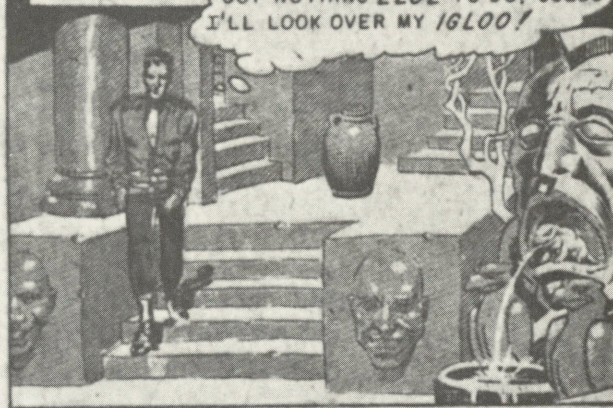
BUT...BABY! DON'T YOU... LOVE ME ANY MORE?

OF COURSE I DO, DARLING! BUT... YOU MUST WAIT NOW...



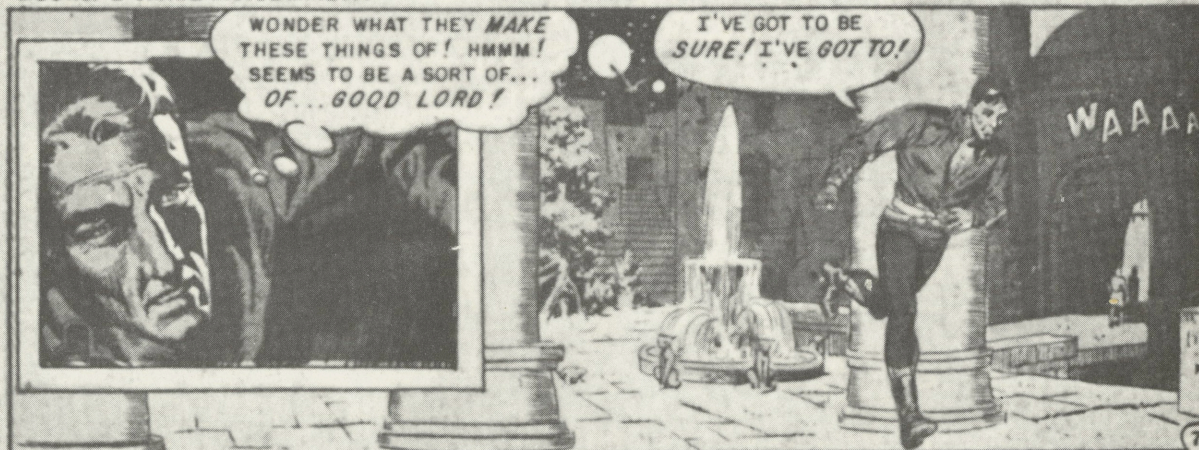
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S COME OVER LUWANA! I AM COMPLETELY SPURNED! AT NIGHT, I GO WALKING...

GOT NOTHING ELSE TO DO! GUESS I'LL LOOK OVER MY IGLOO!



THE ROWS OF BOMB-SHELTER, IGLOO-SHAPED STRUCTURES GLEAM IN THE LIGHT FROM THE PLANET'S TWO MOONS! I CRAWL INSIDE MINE...

SUDDENLY IT HITS ME...THE WHOLE CRAZY PICTURE! FROM BEYOND THE WALL, I HEAR AN INFANT'S PITIFUL WAILING...



WONDER WHAT THEY MAKE THESE THINGS OF! HMMM! SEEMS TO BE A SORT OF... OF... GOOD LORD!

I'VE GOT TO BE SURE! I'VE GOT TO!

WAAAA

I SCALE THE WALL EASILY...



...AND DART INTO THE NURSERY BUILDING...



A LOOK INTO ONE DORMITORY IS ENOUGH! THEY'RE THERE, THE YOUNG ONES... JUST LIKE I EXPECTED THEM TO BE! THEY STARE AT ME, POKING THEIR HEADS OUT OF THEIR SHELLS...



SNAILS!
THAT'S
WHAT THEY ARE!
SNAILS!

I STUMBLE FROM THE NURSERY BUILDING...

I SHOULD HAVE REALIZED! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN! THOSE IGLOO-THINGS ARE THE ALIEN'S SHELLS! THEY'RE BORN WITH THEM, BUT EVENTUALLY EMERGE FROM THEM WHEN THEY'RE FULLY DEVELOPED! THEY USE THEM ONLY FOR PROTECTION AFTER THAT!



WHEN I GET HOME, I TIP-TOE INTO LUWANA'S BEDROOM AND LIGHT THE LIGHT! I STARE AT THE HEAVY STUBBLE GROWING OUT OF HIS CHEEKS, THE BROADENED SHOULDERS, THE FLAT CHEST...



HO, HUH! ARNOLD?
IS IT YOU?

...AND WANDERED AIMLESSLY TOWARD MY HOME...

THAT...THAT EXPLAINS WHY LUWANA HAS BEEN ACTING STRANGELY LATELY! THESE PEOPLE ARE LIKE THE VARIETY OF SNAILS BACK ON EARTH THAT ARE HERMAPHRODITIC! THEY CHANGE SEX! THE MALE CHANGES TO A FEMALE, AND...GULP...VICE VERSA...



LUWANA LOOKS AT ME WITH SLEEPY EYES! EVEN THOSE LONG EYELASHES HAVE SHED! HIS GLANCE DROPS... THEN HE SHRUGS...



ARNOLD, BABY! I WISH YOU'D HURRY UP AND CHANGE... SO THAT THINGS CAN BE NORMAL AGAIN!

THE END!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

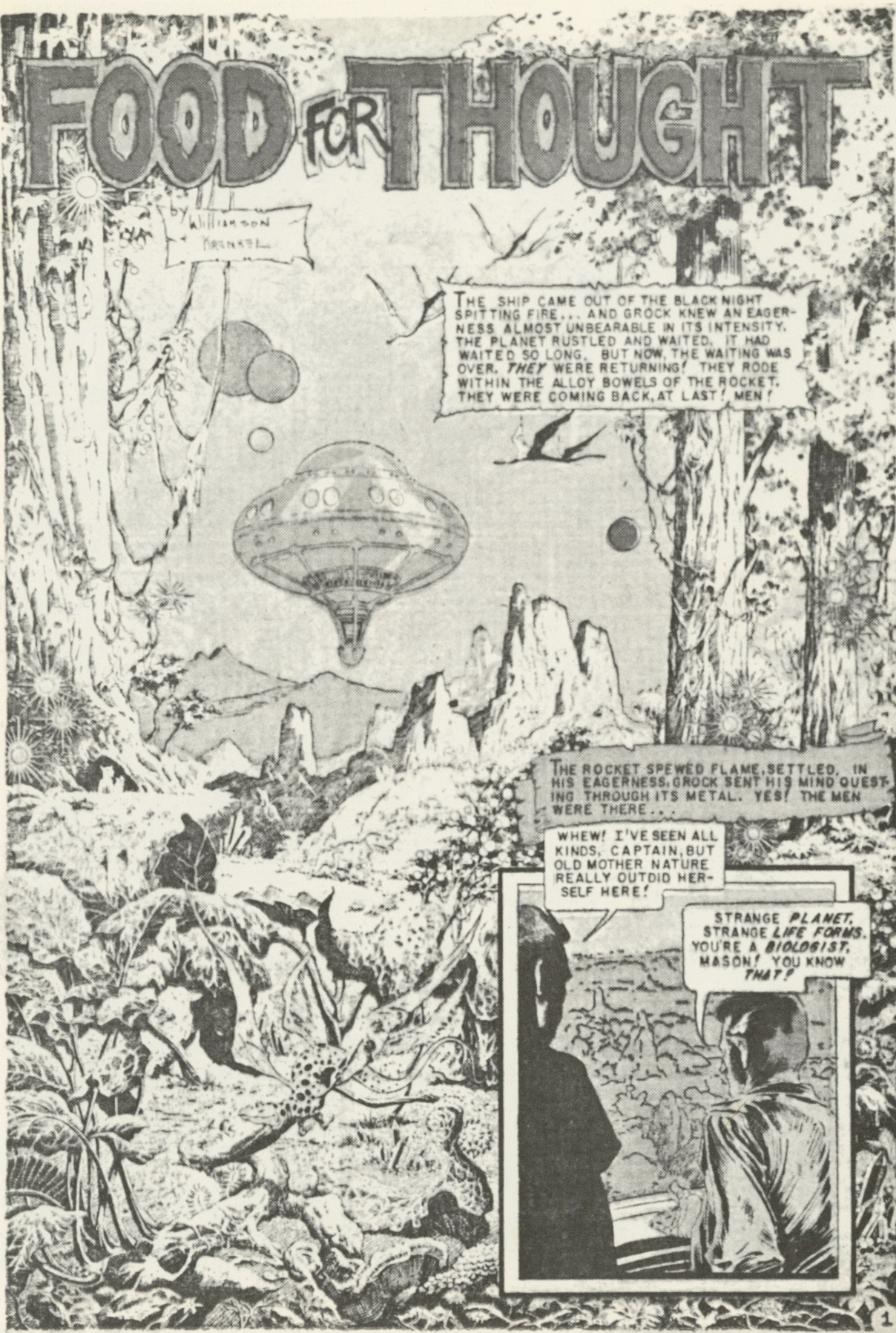
by WILLIAMSON
MORRIS

THE SHIP CAME OUT OF THE BLACK NIGHT SPITTING FIRE... AND GROCK KNEW AN EAGERNESS ALMOST UNBEARABLE IN ITS INTENSITY. THE PLANET RUSTLED AND WAITED. IT HAD WAITED SO LONG. BUT NOW THE WAITING WAS OVER. *THEY* WERE RETURNING! THEY RODE WITHIN THE ALLOY BOWELS OF THE ROCKET. THEY WERE COMING BACK, AT LAST! MEN!

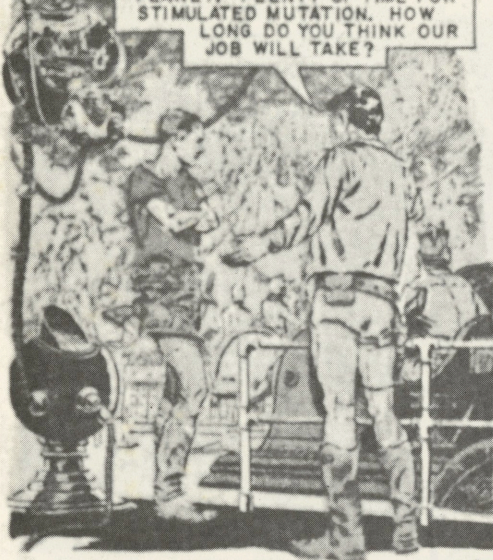
THE ROCKET SPEWED FLAME, SETTLED. IN HIS EAGERNESS, GROCK SENT HIS MIND QUESTING THROUGH ITS METAL. YES! THE MEN WERE THERE...

WHEW! I'VE SEEN ALL KINDS, CAPTAIN, BUT OLD MOTHER NATURE REALLY OUTDID HERSELF HERE!

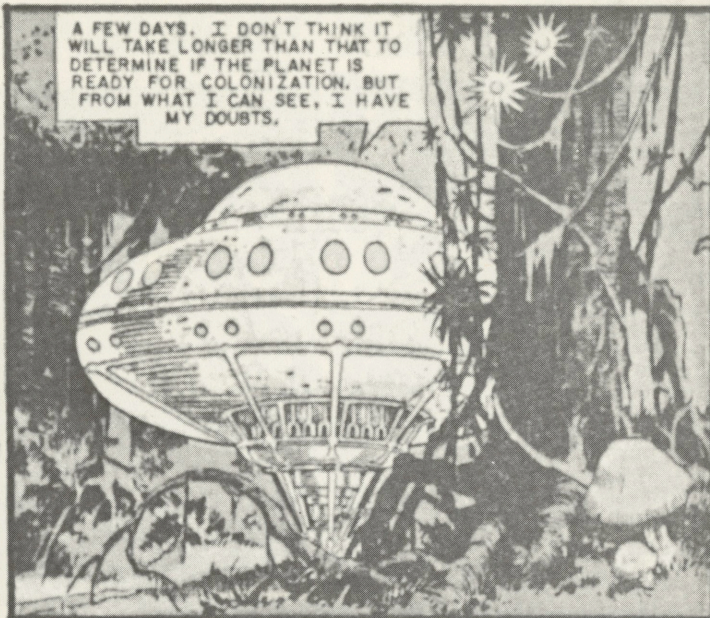
STRANGE PLANET, STRANGE LIFE FORMS. YOU'RE A BIOLOGIST, MASON! YOU KNOW THAT?



IT'S BEEN FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS SINCE EARTH'S ECOLOGICAL TEAMS SEEDED THIS PLANET. PLENTY OF TIME FOR STIMULATED MUTATION. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK OUR JOB WILL TAKE?



A FEW DAYS. I DON'T THINK IT WILL TAKE LONGER THAN THAT TO DETERMINE IF THE PLANET IS READY FOR COLONIZATION. BUT FROM WHAT I CAN SEE, I HAVE MY DOUBTS.

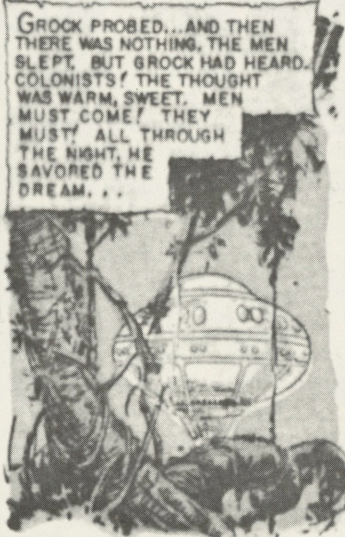


PERSONALLY, I'VE GOT A HUNCH THIS PLACE IS GOING TO BE A BUST AS FAR AS COLONISTS ARE CONCERNED.

THAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. EARTH NEEDS COLONIES. THAT'S WHY THE WASTE PLANETS WERE SEEDED. THE NEED WAS ANTICIPATED. SO LET'S HOPE YOU'RE WRONG, MASON. I'M TURNING IN.



GROCK PROBED...AND THEN THERE WAS NOTHING. THE MEN SLEPT. BUT GROCK HAD HEARD. COLONISTS! THE THOUGHT WAS WARM, SWEET. MEN MUST COME! THEY MUST! ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT, HE SAVORED THE DREAM...



IT HAD BEEN SO LONG, YET GROCK COULD REMEMBER. THE RACIAL MEMORIES LINGERED. DIMLY, HE COULD RECALL THE LEGENDS WHICH TOLD HOW ONCE THIS PLANET HAD BEEN DEAD, STERILE...



THEN THE SHIP HAD COME. THE OTHER SHIP... LONG AGO. IT HAD LEFT BEHIND A GIFT OF SPORES AND SEEDS AND CHEMICALS. THE SHIP HAD LEFT BEHIND THE GIFT OF LIFE...



THE SHIP HAD COME AND GONE, AND LIFE HAD TAKEN HOLD... ON THIS DEAD, STERILE PLANET...



SLOWLY AT FIRST... A TINY SHOOT... A MICROSCOPIC ANIMAL. THEN, AS TIME CREPT BY...



YES, MAN HAD BROUGHT LIFE, AND MAN'S SCIENCE HAD IMPREGNATED THAT LIFE SO THAT IT CHANGED, EVOLVED... SWIFTLY...



FOR HALF A THOUSAND CENTURIES, THE PLANET HAD FLOWERED... AND WAITED. AND NOW, MAN HAD RETURNED...



WE'LL SPLIT INTO TWO PARTIES AS USUAL. YOU ALL KNOW WHAT WE WANT. SAMPLES OF ANIMAL LIFE FORMS, PARTICULARLY **INTELLIGENT** ANIMAL LIFE.

I DON'T THINK WE'LL **FIND** MUCH, CAPTAIN! LOOK THERE!

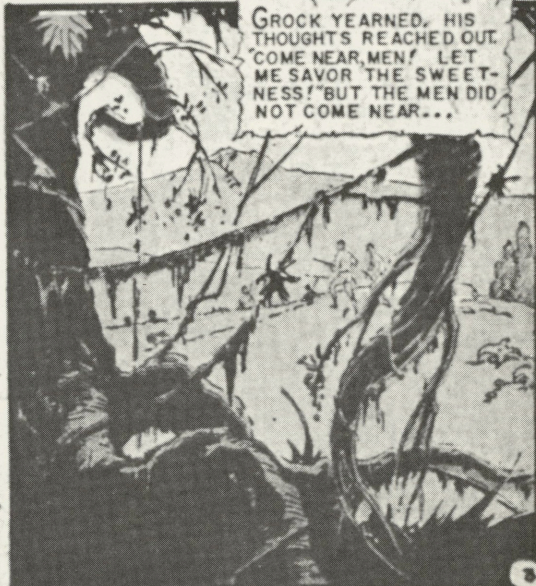


THOSE BONES PROVE THAT THERE ARE **MEAT EATERS** HERE, AND **NONE** OF THE **INTELLIGENT** RACES EAT MEAT ANY LONGER. NOT EVEN **MAN**!

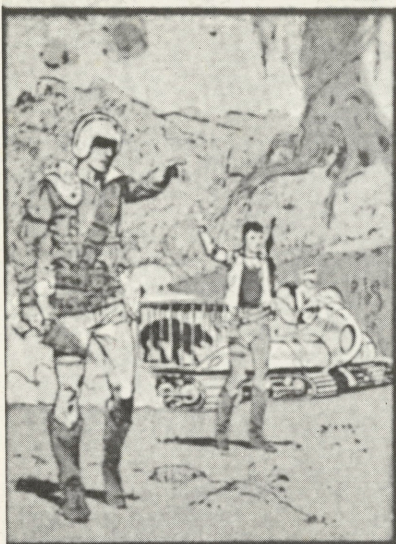
STILL, MAN **DID** EAT MEAT ONCE, MASON! AND MAN **WAS** INTELLIGENT! SO WHO KNOWS? LET'S GO!



GROCK YEARNED, HIS THOUGHTS REACHED OUT, 'COME NEAR, MEN! LET ME SAVOR THE SWEETNESS!' BUT THE MEN DID NOT COME NEAR...



THE MEN DID NOT COME NEAR, AND GROCK TREMBLED WITH DISAPPOINTMENT. ALL HIS THOUGHTS WERE OF THEM IN THE LONG DAYS AFTER...



IT WAS GOOD TO HAVE THEM NEAR AGAIN AT LAST. ON THE THIRD DAY, THEY RETURNED. BUT GROCK DID NOT UNDERSTAND...



WELL, THAT FINISHES THE RUN-DOWN, CAPTAIN. AND THE TOTAL RESULT IS... **NOTHING!** NONE OF THESE THINGS IN THE CAGES SHOWS EVEN A GLIMMERING OF REASON!

AND FROM OUR SURVEY, WE KNOW THAT CONDITIONS ARE EXACTLY SIMILAR **ALL OVER** THIS PLANET. I WAS RIGHT! MAN COULD **NEVER** THRIVE HERE!

NO, I SUPPOSE NOT! UNDER STIMULATED MUTATION THESE ANIMALS HAVE COVERED A MILLION YEARS OF EVOLUTION IN FIFTY THOUSAND. AND YET... **NOTHING!**



EXACTLY! SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, THEIR EVOLUTION TOOK A WRONG TURNING. YOU **SAW** THE FOREST! NO FRUITS, NO NUTS! EVEN THE **ANIMALS** SEEM TO AVOID IT!

I NOTICED THAT. THEY'RE ONLY SEEN IN THE **OPEN**. YET THE **BONES** PROVE THAT THEY ENTERED THE FOREST **ONCE!**



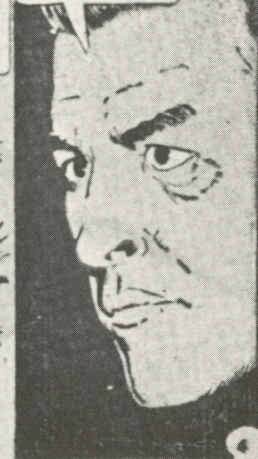
THAT MIGHT BE A **CLUE!** ANY THEORIES, SWANSON? THIS IS IN YOUR LINE. WHY WOULD ANIMALS LEARN TO **AVOID** THE FORESTS? NOXIOUS SOIL? RADIATION?

SORRY, CAPTAIN, THE SOIL IS **GOOD** AND THERE IS **NO RADIATION!** ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT IF **ANIMALS** CAN EVOLVE INTO THINGS LIKE THESE HERE... THE SAME THING COULD HAPPEN TO **MAN!**

IN OTHER WORDS, WE'RE **STUMPED!**

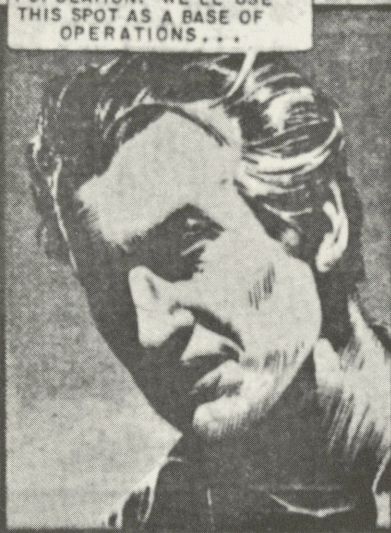
STUMPED! IT WOULD BE **CRIMINAL** TO BRING COLONISTS HERE! **LOOK** AT THE PLACE! THE ONLY WAY IT WILL EVER BE **FIT** FOR COLONIZATION IS IF IT'S BURNED CLEAN AND WE **START ALL OVER AGAIN!**

I'M AFRAID THAT'S **JUST** WHAT WE'LL HAVE TO **DO**, MASON! FIFTY THOUSAND YEARS... **WASTED!** WHAT A **PITY!**



NO! GROCK ALMOST SCREAMED THE WORD. BUT THE MEN WOULD NOT HAVE HEARD, EVEN IF HE HAD. THEIR MINDS WERE... DIFFERENT...

STILL, THERE SEEMS TO BE NO CHOICE! EARTH NEEDS ROOM FOR HER EXCESS POPULATION. WE'LL USE THIS SPOT AS A BASE OF OPERATIONS...



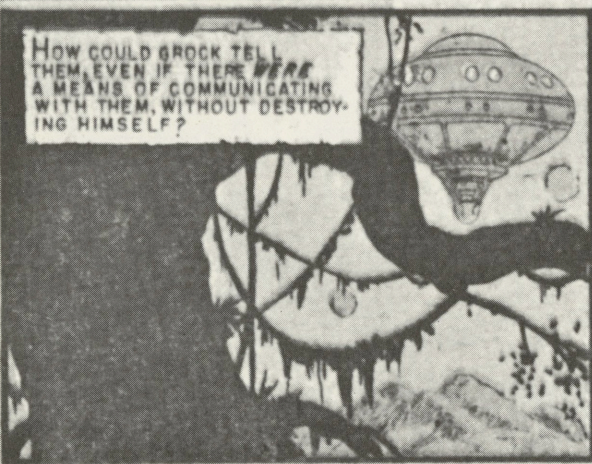
IN THE MORNING WE BEGIN OPERATION BURN-OUT! AND SMALL LOSS!



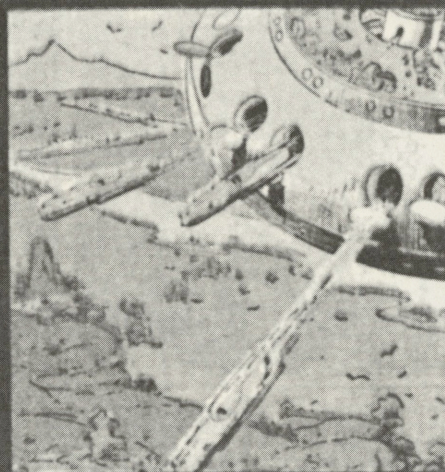
MAN HAD COME. AND NOW, MAN WAS GOING TO DESTROY! BUT THE MEN WERE *WRONG*! THERE *WAS* INTELLIGENT LIFE HERE! THERE *WAS*! ONLY, HOW COULD GROCK MAKE THE MEN UNDERSTAND?



HOW COULD GROCK TELL THEM, EVEN IF THERE *WERE* A MEANS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THEM, WITHOUT DESTROYING HIMSELF?



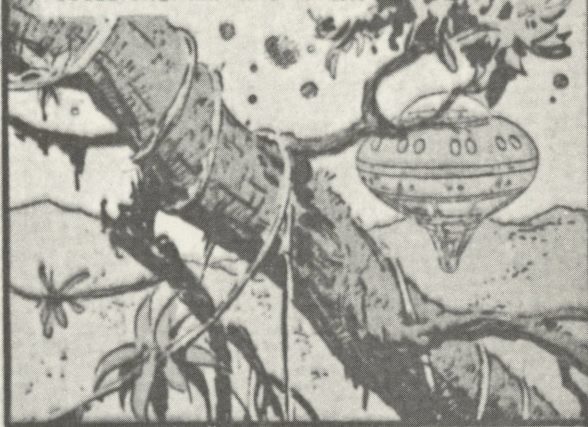
THERE WAS NO WAY. AND SO GROCK SAW, THAT NEXT MORNING...



GROCK SAW THE LANCES OF FLAME. THE FIRES FLICKERED AND LEAPED AND DIED. AND BEHIND, THE FIRES LEFT BARE ROCK, BARRENNESS...



DAY BY DAY, MILE BY MILE, THE PLANET DIED. AND GROCK COULD ONLY WATCH. GROCK COULD ONLY WAIT AND HOPE...



GROCK WAITED... AND YEARNED. AND THE FLAMING DEATH MOVED CLOSER. BUT IN THE END, THE WAITING WAS NOT IN VAIN...

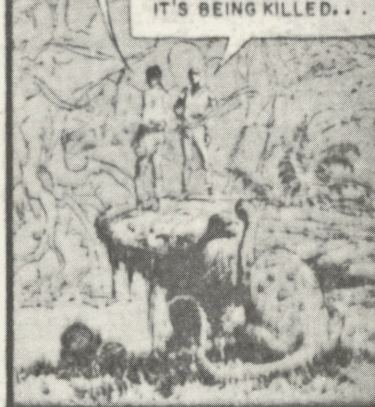
WELL, I GUESS WE'RE ABOUT THROUGH, AREN'T WE, SIR?

JUST ABOUT! WE'LL BURN OUT THIS LAST PATCH TOMORROW. THEN WE'LL RE-SEED. AND I CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY!



WEIRD, ISN'T IT?

WEIRD... AND DISTURBING. SOMEHOW, I ALMOST FEEL AS IF THE PLANET KNOWS IT'S BEING KILLED...



EVERY NOW AND THEN, I GET A... WELL, CALL IT AN *EMOTION*. IT'S AS IF SOMETHING... SOMEONE... WERE REACHING INTO MY MIND...

ON THIS PLANET, MASON?

IF YOU'RE SUGGESTING THAT THERE IS AN INTELLIGENCE HERE WHICH WE'VE OVERLOOKED, JUST TAKE A LOOK AROUND YOU! SPIKED PLANTS, A FEW SKELETONS. THAT'S ALL THIS PLACE HAS MANAGED TO PRODUCE!



YOU NEED A *CHANGE*, MASON! WE ALL DO! WHY DON'T WE SLEEP OUT IN THE OPEN TONIGHT? MAYBE THE FRESH AIR WILL WASH THE BOGEYS OUT OF OUR MINDS.



GROCK SHIVERED. IT WAS TOO MUCH TO HOPE FOR. GROCK HAD WISHED SO HARD... FOR SO LONG. AFTERWARD, HIS WISH CAME TRUE...



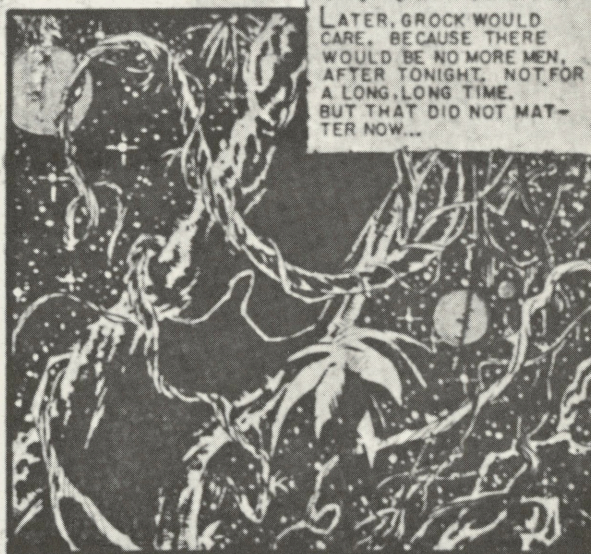
BLASTED EMPTY, USELESS PLANET! IT GIVES ME THE CREEPS!

AFTERWARD, GROCK COULD HEAR THE WORDS AND NOT CARE. HE COULD FORGET THE FLAMES AND THE BURNING, EVEN WHEN THE CAPTAIN HIMSELF MUTTERED IN HIS SLEEP...

...NO... INTELLIGENT LIFE... NOTHING THAT... THINKS... BURN IT... BURN IT ALL... START OVER...



LATER, GROCK WOULD CARE. BECAUSE THERE WOULD BE NO MORE MEN, AFTER TONIGHT. NOT FOR A LONG, LONG TIME. BUT THAT DID NOT MATTER NOW...



FOR NOW, GROCK LET HIS CREEPERS DOWN... GENTLY...



MAN HAD RETURNED, AT LAST. AND GROCK WAS CONTENT. IT HAD BEEN SO LONG SINCE ANY ANIMAL HAD VENTURED NEAR HIM...



THE MEN STRUGGLED... CALLED OUT. FROM THE SHIP, A SLEEPY VOICE ANSWERED, A FIGURE APPEARED IN THE PORT, WEAPON IN HAND...

W-WHAT GOES ON OUT HERE? CAN'T A GUY GET SOME REST? I... WHAT THE...?!

THE TREE, HOAD! THE TREE'S ALIVE! SHOOT! SHOOT...



GROCK SHUDDERED, DROPPING THE MEN, AS THE STREAM OF DESTRUCTIVE ENERGY FROM HOAD'S WEAPON DISINTEGRATED HIS TRUNK... HIS FEEDER-ROOTS...



GROCK'S SAP RAN. HIS VINES DROOPED, STRING-LIKE. HIS LEAVES CURLED. AND DARKNESS BEGAN TO NUMB HIS PERCEPTIVE SENSES. VAGUELY, HE COULD HEAR THE MEN... SENSE THEIR VOICES, FADING...

THERE WAS YOUR INTELLIGENT LIFE, CAPTAIN! THAT TREE!

INTELLIGENT? HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT, MASON? IS A "VENUS FLY-TRAP" INTELLIGENT? CAN IT THINK? CAN IT FEEL? CAN IT REASON?



GROCK WITHERED. HIS SENSES REELED. THEIR VOICES WERE ONLY WHISPERS NOW...

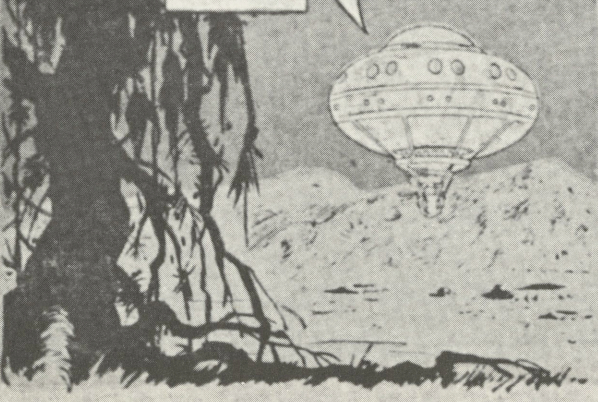
CAN YOU SAY A "VENUS FLY-TRAP" CAN'T THINK... CAN'T FEEL... CAN'T REASON, CAPTAIN?

RIDICULOUS! WHO EVER HEARD OF AN INTELLIGENT TREE?



GROCK DIED. HIS LEAVES DROPPED LIKE PAPER BITS, TORN BY CHILDREN AND TOSSED TO THE WIND. CHILDREN WHO COULD NOT UNDERSTAND, BECAUSE IT WAS BEYOND THEIR LIMITED IMAGINATIONS...

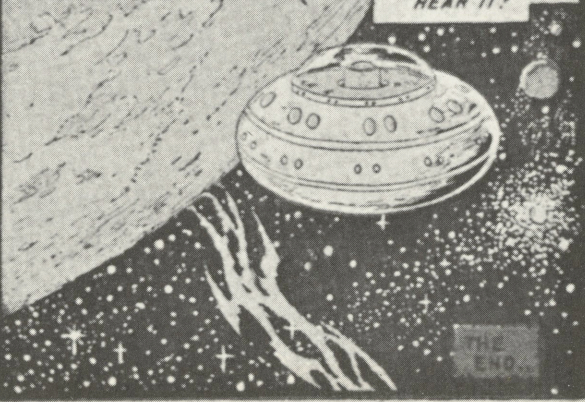
ALL RIGHT! LET'S GET GOING! IT'S ALMOST DAWN, ANYWAY! BURN OUT THAT LAST PATCH, INCLUDING MASON'S INTELLIGENT TREE! WE'VE GOT TO BE ON OUR WAY!



LATER, THE SHIP ROSE INTO THE MORNING LIGHT. BEHIND IT, THE PLANET LAY BLACK AND SCORCHED AND STERILE. THE CAPTAIN TURNED TO MASON...

IF THAT TREE WAS SO INTELLIGENT, MASON, WHY COULDN'T IT COMMUNICATE WITH US?

PERHAPS IT TRIED, CAPTAIN! PERHAPS WE WEREN'T INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO HEAR IT!



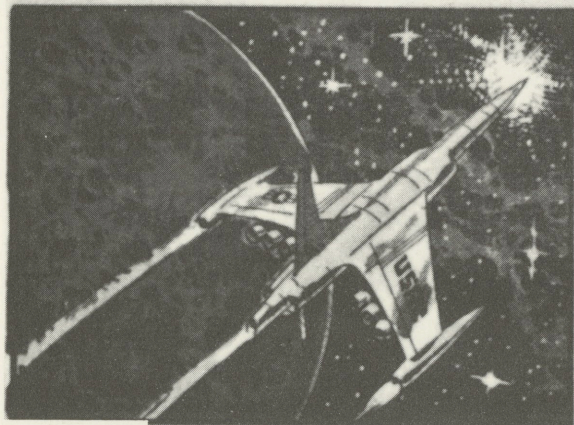
THE END..

MY WORLD

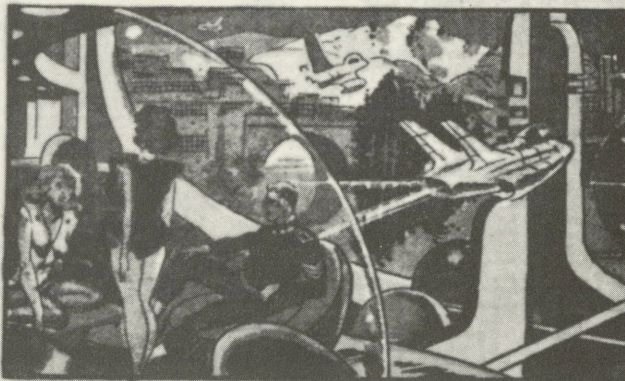
THIS IS MY WORLD. THIS IS THE WORLD I LOVE. IT IS A STEAMING TROPICAL SWAMP, DAMP AND STINKING AND ALIVE WITH SCREAMING BIRDS AND SLITHERING LIZARDS AND HUMMING INSECTS AND GIANT DINOSAURS THAT SPLASH THROUGH ITS STAGNANT POOLS AND SLOSH THROUGH ITS SUCKING BOGS IN SEARCH OF FOOD TO FILL THEIR CAVERNOUS BELLIES.



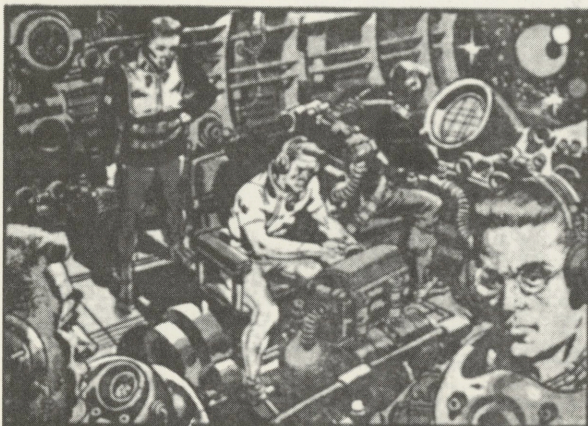
IT IS AN ANGRY ROCKET SHIP, LEAPING UPWARD AT THE STARS...SPITTING FLAME AND SMOKE AND ROARING SO LOUD IT SEEMS TO SHAKE DOWN THE VERY HEAVENS IT IS ATTEMPTING TO CONQUER...



IT IS A GLEAMING CITY, RISING FROM THE ROLLING COUNTRYSIDE AND REACHING TOWARD THE SUN, EMBRACING WITHIN ITS GLASS-WALLED BUILDINGS ITS DWELLERS, WHO COME AND GO IN SHINING BEETLE-CARS OR HUMMING AERO-CABS OR STAND CONTENTEDLY ON SLOWLY MOVING SIDEWALKS...



THIS IS MY WORLD. IT IS A WORLD OF GRIM-FACED MEN SITTING BEFORE BATTERIES OF GAUGES AND DIALS AND LEVERS AND BUTTONS, GUIDING THEIR METAL MONSTER ACROSS A HAIRSBREADTH OF THE VAST BLACK GULF OF UNENDING SPACE...



THIS IS THE WORLD I LOVE. IT IS THE MOMENT WHEN THE ROCKET-SHIP BREAKS FREE OF EARTH'S GRAVITY AND STREAKS THROUGH THE VOID IN FREE FALL... WHEN ITS CREWMEN ARE SUDDENLY WEIGHTLESS AND FLOAT LIKE CHILDREN'S BALLOONS AT THE CIRCUS...



IT IS A WORLD OF EXPLORATION INTO THE UNKNOWN... THE SUDDEN THRILL OF GAZING UPON AN ALIEN LANDSCAPE THAT NO HUMAN BEING HAS EVER GAZED UPON BEFORE...



...THE SUDDEN VIOLENT ATTACK OF SHRIeking ALIEN MONSTERS...



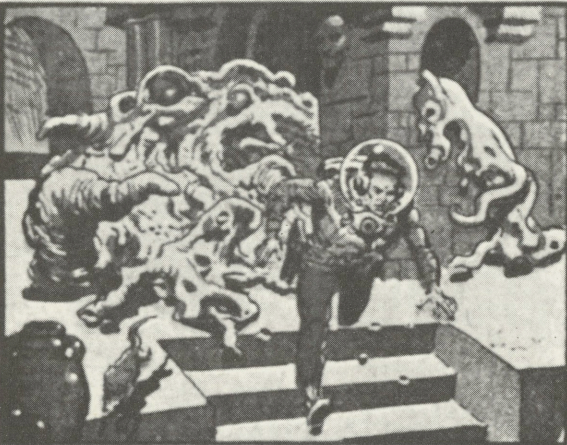
...THE MONSTERS' EQUALLY SUDDEN DESTRUCTION... BLASTED TO SMITHEREENS BY POWERFUL WEAPONS OF MY WORLD...



THE OTHER ALIEN CREATURES...HARMLESS...CURIOUS...CUTE...



THE SUCKING GULPING MOUNTAIN OF SHIMMERING PROTOPLASMIC LIFE, SLITHERING FROM ONE OF THE RUINED BUILDINGS...



THIS IS MY WORLD. IT IS A WORLD OF LONELY WOMEN WHO TURN THEIR EYES TO THE HEAVENS AND WATCH FOR THE MOVING FLAME AMONG THE STARS THAT SIGNIFIES THE RETURN OF THEIR SPACE-MEN...



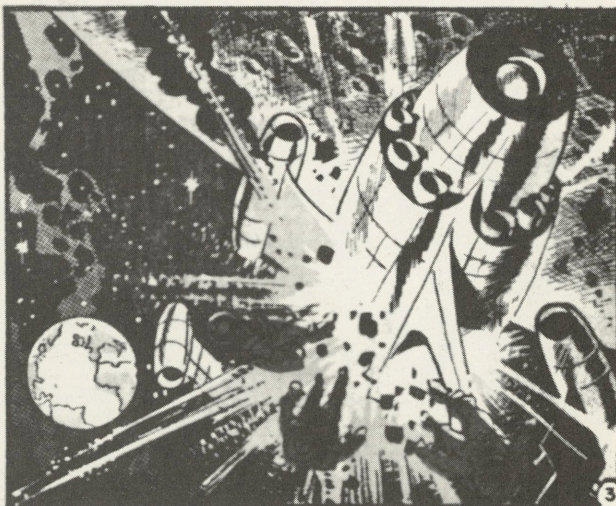
THE RUINS OF A ONCE PROUD CITY...NOW FALLING TO DUST. BUILT BY AN ANCIENT CIVILIZATION, WHOSE MEMBERS, TOO, HAVE LONG SINCE FALLEN TO DUST...



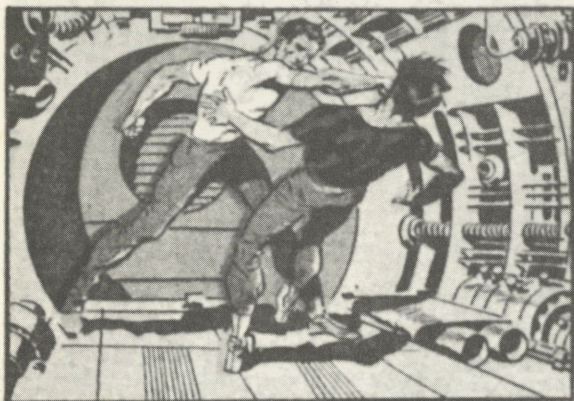
...ABSORBING ALL ORGANIC MATERIAL IN ITS PATH...ENGULFING TOM OR DICK OR HARRY WHILE I LISTEN TO HIS BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAMS ON MY INTERCOM...



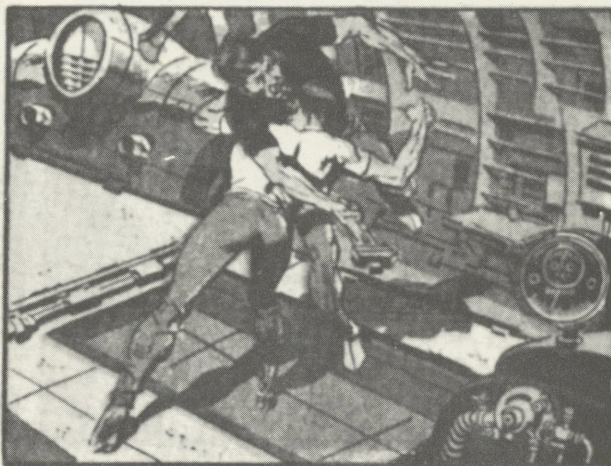
... AND THE MEN WHO NEVER COME BACK...THE MEN WHO ARE FLUNG INTO THE VOID BY THE VIOLENT EXPLOSION OF THEIR HOMEWARD-BOUND ROCKET...



MY WORLD IS A WORLD OF VIOLENT EMOTION...OF ANGER AND HATE BUILDING UP THROUGH THE DRAGGING MONTHS OF TRAVELING THROUGH SPACE. THE SUDDEN FLARE-UP... THE VOLCANIC ERUPTION OF SUPPRESSED ENERGY...



...THE STRUGGLE OF MUSCLE PITTED AGAINST MUSCLE... BONE AGAINST BONE...SINEW AND TENDON...



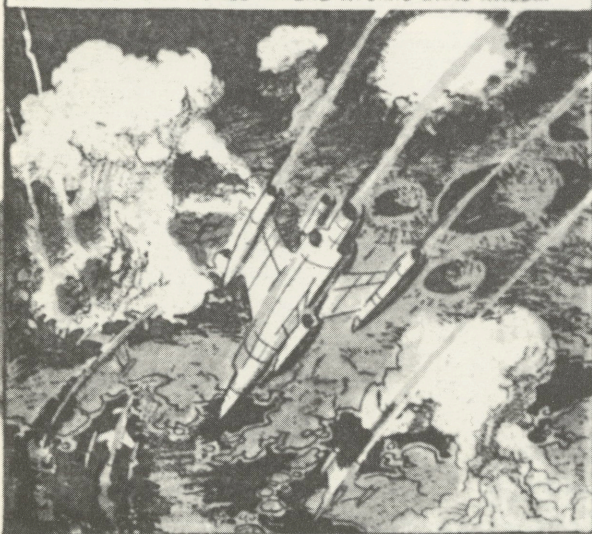
...THE FINAL VICTORY OF ONE OVER THE OTHER. THE SICKENING THUD OF THE METAL WRENCH CRUSHING SKULL...SPATTERING BRAINS...SPILLING BLOOD...



MY WORLD IS A WORLD WHERE BEAUTIFUL ALIEN CREATURES SIT BESIDE A STILL POOL AND CARESS A WEARY SPACE-MAN, STROKING HIS HAIR AND KISSING HIS CHEEKS AND MAKING HIM FORGET ABOUT EARTH AND EVER RETURNING...



MY WORLD IS A WORLD WHERE ATOMIC WARS RAGE...



...WHERE WHOLE CITIES ARE LEVELLED BY ONE MISSIVE OF DESTRUCTION. WHERE A BABY SITS AMONG THE RUINS, COVERED WITH RADIATION BURNS, CRYING FOR MY WORLD...



MY WORLD CAN BE A WORLD OF DESOLATION...
WITHOUT LIFE...WITHOUT HOPE...



...OR IT CAN BE A WORLD OF EVERLASTING PEACE AND
UNDERSTANDING AND THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN...



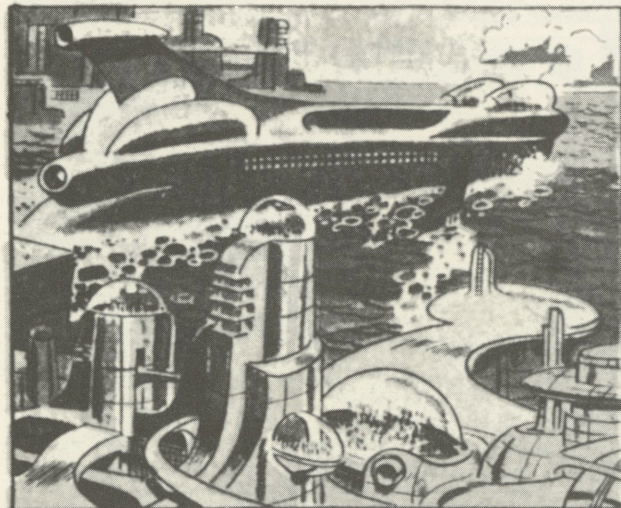
MY WORLD CAN BE A WORLD OF SPACE-STATIONS...



...OF ROCKET TRANSPORTS THAT LEAP ACROSS CONTINENTS IN
MINUTES...



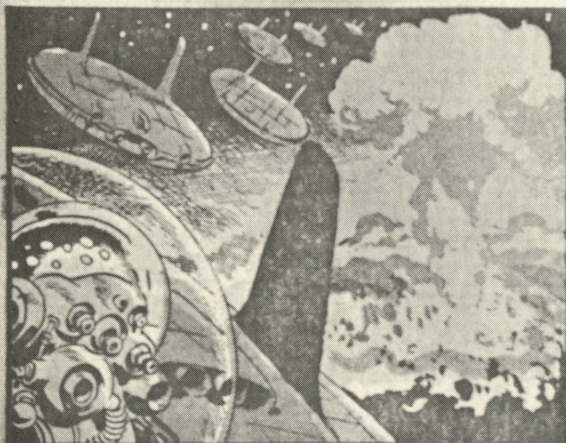
...OF ATOMIC-POWERED LINERS THAT SPAN GREAT OCEANS
WITH THE ENERGY DERIVED FROM A SINGLE LUMP OF COAL...



...OF GREAT SPACE-SHIPS THAT CARRY TOURISTS ON
BRIEF HOLIDAYS TO VENUS OR MARS OR SATURN...



...OR MY WORLD CAN BE UGLY. IT CAN BE A WORLD OF INVASIONS FROM OUTER SPACE BY HORRIBLE INTELLIGENT ALIENS BENT ON CONQUERING MY WORLD... COMING ACROSS SPACE IN FLEETS OF FLYING SAUCERS...



...LANDING AT NIGHT AND ENTERING MY CITIES AND KILLING AND MAIMING AND DESTROYING...



MY WORLD IS WHAT I CHOOSE TO MAKE IT. MY WORLD IS YESTERDAY...



...OR TODAY...



...OR TOMORROW...



FOR MY WORLD IS THE WORLD OF SCIENCE-FICTION... CONCEIVED IN MY MIND AND PLACED UPON PAPER WITH PENCIL AND INK AND BRUSH AND SWEAT AND A GREAT DEAL OF LOVE FOR MY WORLD. FOR I AM A SCIENCE-FICTION ARTIST. MY NAME IS WOOD.



THE
END

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